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Give us our Rights!

OR AN

ADDRESS

TO THE

PEOPLE OF BRITAIN,

Clearly Demonstrating,

THAT THOSE

R I G H T S

ARE

Universal Suffrage, Annual Parliaments,

AND THE

Freedom of Popular Association.

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Give us our Rights!

Friends, Countrymen and Fellow Citizens.

A Short time before the ancient Romans lost their freedom, it was observable, that there was not left any considerable body of citizens, who cared to think and to act for themselves. Forgetting their RIGHTS and their inherent power, they were silly and abject enough, to form no party of their own in favour of their common liberties; nor aspired at any thing higher than cutting each others throats in the service of those intriguing and ambitious senators, who at that time were contending with each other for the reins of dominion. In such a state of things, bribery and faction reigned triumphant, the senate was a market for the sale of men's consciences, and all things good and honourable were sacrificed to the views of the respective leaders. The character of the times, in short, was summed up in this one mournful exclamation; "CAESAR hath friends, and POMPEY hath friends, but none are friends, to ROME!" And so in the issue it proved: for the instant that Pompey was no more, Caesar became the tyrant of his country. Fatal event! and very fit to be had in remembrance by you, my countrymen; for, from that day to this a period of eighteen hundred years, hath Rome continued in slavery and contempt. Nor doth it require much sagacity to pronounce, that such also will be the fate of England, whenever it may with equal truth be affirmed, that "MINISTRY hath friends and OPPOSITION hath friends; but none are friends to the CONSTITUTION."

I trust, however, that that æra is not yet at hand; for besides the evidences from all parts, that the PEOPLE are making a progress in the necessary work of forming a distinct party of their own, in support of their common RIGHTS

as the only possible MEANS of obtaining such a substantial reform of THEIR OWN HOUSE OF PARLIAMENT, as would at once be a redress of our grievances and a security to our threatened freedom.

The removal of wicked ministers can produce no permanent effects, unless followed up by an immediate overthrow of CORRUPTION. It was *corruption* that so long supported such ministers, and enabled them to plunge their country into the depths of calamity, and to bring it to the very brink of ruin and despair, before the torpid beings who fill the Commons' House of Parliament could be roused and stimulated to a sense of their duty. *Corruption* therefore is what we have most to dread. It must be torn up by the roots, hewn to pieces, and cast into the fire of reformation to be utterly consumed, or we are undone. Of so generative a faculty is it possessed, that if but a branch, a sprig, a bud of it escape the fire, wherever it falls 'twill again take root, and flourish as luxuriant and rampant as ever. The *Septennial* and the *Triennial* Acts, and the *Statute of Disfranchisement* of the 8th of Hen. VI. must be cast into the flames. They are the disgrace, as they have proved the curse of our country. They carry slavery in every line, and every word is a link in the chain that binds us. Once freed from these fetters, nothing then remains wanting to secure our freedom but a single bill, such as that of the Duke of Richmond in 1780, for regulating the detail of elections.

GIVE US OUR RIGHTS, and then all will be safe!

The business of the People is the plainest and simplest imaginable. They have but *one* thing to ask for. *A constitutional representation*, secured against future abuses, is their *sole* object. Let them stick to that; let them confine their deputies to that *alone*; and employ as deputies, none but men like-minded with themselves; and then success must speedily crown their labours.

It only remains therefore, for the People's Advocates, whose object cannot be power without reformation, nor private gain or aggrandizement without substantial good, and lasting freedom to their country, to unfold the real causes of our national evils; and on that subject to speak the truth, and all the truth. Truth and honest information generally lie in a narrow compass. On this occasion, it is contained in the following "DECLARATION

“DECLARATION OF RIGHTS,

“ *without which no Englishman can be a free man, nor the English nation a free people.*”

1st. The Government of this Realm, and the making of laws for the same, ought to be lodged in the hands of King, Lords of Parliament, and the Representatives of *the whole body* of the FREE men of this Realm.

2d. Every Englishman (Infants, insane Persons and Criminals only excepted) is, of *common right*, and by the laws of God, a FREE man, and entitled to the full enjoyment of LIBERTY.

3d. An Englishman's Liberty, or Freedom, consists in having *an actual share*, either in legislation itself, or in the *appointing* of those who are to frame the Laws; which, although they ought to protect him in the full enjoyment of those absolute rights, that are vested in him by the immutable Laws of Nature, may yet be fabricated to the destruction of his Person, his Property, his religious Freedom, Family and Fame.

4th. It is the Right of the Commons of England to elect a *new* House of Parliament Once at least in *every* year: Because, when a Parliament continues for a longer term than *one Session*, Thousands, who have attained to man's estate since it was elected, and are therefore entitled to enter into possession of *their best Inheritance*, the actual exercise of their elective Franchise, are in that case *unjustly denied their Right* and *excluded from Freedom*.

Note 1st. Since the *all* of one man is as dear to him as the *all* of another, the poor man has an *equal* right, but *more* need, to have a representative in parliament than a rich one.

Note 2d. Those Englishmen who have *no* votes for electing a representative, are *not* free men, as justice and the constitution of their country require; but are enslaved, to *the representatives* of those who *have* votes: For, to be enslaved, is to have *no will of our own* in the choice of lawmakers, but to be governed by rulers, whom *other men have set over us*.

Note 3d.

Note 3d. By the operation of *one* unconstitutional statute (8 Hen. VI.) enacted on *false pretences*, a very great majority of Englishmen are tyrannically debarred from their birthright of voting for members of parliament, which was a sacred inheritance enjoyed by their forefathers, *until the enacting of that statute*. Thus by the craft of statesmen, the far greater part of the English nation are constantly *taxed without being represented*, and *compelled to obey laws to which they never assented*; which are the very *definitions of slavery*; and thus are Englishmen degraded to a level with the very *cattle in the field*, or the *sheep in the fold*, which have *no voice to say*, "Why are we bought and sold? *Why are we yoked and laden with heavy burthens? Why are we fleeced and led to the slaughter!*"

Note 4th. For the making of laws, our constitution knows no such thing as *virtual representation*. Members of parliament are the *Attornies* of those they represent.—Who ever heard that the Attorney of *John* shall dispose of the property of *Thomas*, because *John* and *Thomas* happen to reside in the same town or country?

Note 5th. Parliaments of *one Session* were the immemorial usage of England from the earliest antiquity, and our right thereto stood confirmed in the written law of the land, from the time of the immortal *Alfred* down to the reign of King *Charles Ist.* a period of about a thousand years. In all that time, not a single disadvantage to liberty from the *shortness* of sessional parliaments was ever recorded in history; whereas longer parliaments, in about one hundred years time, have left us nothing of liberty but the name.

Friends, Countrymen and Fellow Citizens,

I hope, this declaration will remain in the esteem of every one of you. I hope it holds that place in your hearts which is due to a measure, that can alone effect your civil salvation. I hope you will exert yourselves with the generous warmth of Englishmen, to aid and promote the circulation of this declaration, till no cottage in the kingdom shall be esteemed furnished without it, till no inhabitant of our island shall be ignorant of its contents.

If

If the crown's *Ministers* who oppress us under those abuses which its truths would correct, can disprove what is therein declared, they may then entertain a hope of being permitted to oppress on; or if any men in *Opposition* can make out any such disproof, then they may also, with more plausibility continue inactive towards reforming the Commons House of Parliament.

Long have we wanted such a *Declaration*, as a *Touchstone*, for enabling us at once to distinguish between public spirit and faction; as a sure *Criterion* of that zeal for liberty, which is accompanied with a knowledge of what it is; and as a *Furnace*, for the proof of real patriotism. That patriotism which bears not this test unhurt, is counterfeit, base, and useless to any noble purpose. 'Twere an abuse of words to call him a *patriot*, who held not sacred as the life of his parent, those rights of his country *without which it cannot be free*. How great then is that prostitution of language, which would adorn with the noblest of all civil appellations, men who are avowedly hostile to those rights; or men who can meanly truck and barter them away, for their own little dirty interests; upon the men who occupy stations that belong to the patriot only, or that might well inspire with patriotism even sordidness itself! Let us call then with one voice, to demand their vindication of those common rights of Englishmen, those rights which belong equally to every individual. Let us stimulate the indolent to action, and animate the timid to spirit and firmness. In the thoughtless, let us excite reflection; and teach the proud and the selfish to blush. And as for those of an irregular and dominant ambition, who think nations made for kings and ministers, if we cannot inspire them with humility, we may at least be their instructors in good policy. If we cannot compel them to feel for their country, we may however prevail with them to feel for themselves ere it be too late!--But they had far better *be* what they would be thought; and then they might be any thing which it is fit that citizens should be in a free country.

The *Declaration*, you will readily perceive, is no manifesto of demagogues for factious purposes; but a plain appeal to the understandings of all men, in favour of truth, justice, religion, law, freedom and peace. It has no regard to the interests, either of *Ministry*, or of *Op-*

position, otherwise than as they are Englishmen, with the same common interest as others in the constitution. It breathes the true spirit of equity; for it proposes the equal freedom and security of *all*. It intends no elevation nor selection of one party, in exclusion of any other; for in an independent Commons House of Parliament, freely and in equal proportions chosen by *all* the people, every party must be fairly represented, and have that precise weight in the legislature which belongs to it. And then it will be, that those statesmen who are most acceptable to the people will always be firmly supported in office, without bribed votes, or any of those wretched practices, which now taint with corruption, and reduce to debility, the whole service of the state at home and abroad, by making *servility* the grand recommendation to preferment in every department.

I persuade myself, that you will not like the *Declaration* the less, because it contains no subtle and flattering address to your passions, in order to mislead your judgment; nor attempts, through the medium of your prejudices, to betray your solid interests. In short it solicits not your support either of *Ministry* or of *Opposition*, it attempts not to seduce you into the service of either a *Cæsar* or a *Pompey*; but it honestly exhorts you *to save yourselves*, by taking your own part of the government into *your own hands*; which is the only method to preserve national freedom, and advance the common prosperity, that nature, or the constitution, or the wit of man have yet revealed unto us.

If the sacred franchise of annual election* be the undoubted *right* of all; it would be to suspect any one's common honesty; to suppose he could attempt to withhold the enjoyment of it from a single Englishman: and if it be *necessary* to the common freedom; it would be to impeach his understanding, to suppose him incapable of perceiving that truth. "The political freedom of a community, is the aggregate of the political freedoms of the individuals who compose it. As their several persons collectively, make the community itself; so their several freedoms united, constitute the general freedom." Nothing can be plainer. Now, an immense majority of the people of

* Properly sessional, but as it would return only once a year, annual and sessional may be used as convertible terms.

England, about *nine parts in ten*,* are totally deprived of this freedom, and in a condition which is the very definition of slavery, "governed by rulers whom *other men* have set over "them." Under these circumstances can a nation be *free*? The fact is, that it is *not* free; and that proposition is the proof of it. But there is also another proof, that may perhaps come more feelingly home to mens minds; which is, that the people do not freely and voluntarily *give* and *grant* aids, in support of a system of government they approve of; but groan under, and unwillingly pay, an enormous taxation, *imposed* by the *minister* of the crown, for prosecuting amongst other things, *an unjust and unnecessary war against the liberties of man*; and destructive of the obvious interests of this commercial and maritime country.

'Oh,' but it is said, 'the non-electors are *virtually* represented; and have the benefit of the same laws with 'those who elect the lawmakers.' This mode of reasoning may have its force; but here, the converse of the proposition is the stronger side, by all the difference between *one* and *ten*, and it ought to stand thus; 'The electors are *virtually* enslaved; because they are subject to the same laws, 'with nine times their number who are *actually* enslaved,' 'Oh but,' still it will be replied, 'the non-electors must 'be virtually represented and all be free; because the law- 'makers themselves are subject to their own laws, and stand 'on the same ground with the people, in respect of taxation.' But this "*must be*," does not yet follow; nor can either of these conclusions be admitted, until it be first proved,

* According to the calculations of Mr. Howlet, in his late pamphlet, the number of souls in England and Wales is estimated at little short of 9,000,000, and he tells you that he states it at the lowest that his authorities will admit of; as, indeed he appears to do very fairly, and to calculate from very good materials. We may therefore with propriety enough on this occasion, reckon 9,000,000 to be the number of our inhabitants; a fourth part of which, or 2,250,000 will be the males at man's estate.

2,250,000 males competent to vote.

214,000 voters of all denominations at present.

2,036,000 competent men who are deprived of their franchise.

214,000) 2,250,000 (10 so that the votes are only a tenth part of those who ought to vote.

214,000

110,000

C

ved, that the Roman people were free under the *Senate* in the times of the *Emperors*, and that no law-makers can be sufficiently base, to sell their own liberty, together with that of their country. But is there really, my countrymen, on difference, in point of taxation, between the lawmakers and the rest of the people? By the *red book*, and other public documents, we shall find, that the taxes which a ministerial member imposes upon *himself*, are repaid him not with interest only, but ten-fold, an hundred-fold, full measure, pressed down and overflowing. While voting money out of the peoples pockets to put into his own; while thousands must give up their little indulgencies to feed his pomp, luxury and riot; and while he is buying up those estates, which the common distresses of his fellow citizens compel him to part with *at a reduced value*, I cannot see how he and they stand on the same ground in respect of taxation. But the very term of *virtual*, as applied to representation in parliament, is fit only for the mouth of a driveller*.

But, that taxes are not *granted*, but *imposed*; that nine parts in ten of the nation are defrauded of the elective franchise, and the nation *enslaved*, is not all; for, as though this were not enough, that injustice is followed by such a train of other iniquities, in the distribution of the franchise amongst those few who still retain it, as, upon the whole, to constitute the most irritating scheme of wickedness, with which any nation pretending to the rights of freedom was ever insulted: being at once a pattern of folly, depravity, and the grossest absurdity; and yet, *effectual to all the ends of oppression*. To our disgrace as human beings, and to the infamy of our nation, those sacred rights which, unless forfeited for criminality, are every Englishman's birthright, and inherent in his nature as a man; which are his by the immediate gift of God, dependent on no human laws, nor subject to any *qualifications*, terms or conditions whatsoever; are,

* How this term has been misapplied, may be seen by recurring to the science of Optics; from whence it has been borrowed. A virtual focus is that point, where converging rays of light would center, if they were not diverted by refraction or otherwise; but where they never do center. Virtual in this meaning, applied to the representation of non-electors, is most happily expressive of their situation; as descriptive of that representation which they would enjoy, if it were not diverted by injustice.

are, by one despotic statute (8 *Hen. VI.*) and a variety of shameful decisions of your House of Commons, made to depend in one place, on possessing forty shillings by the year in land; in another, on being an housekeeper; in a third, on occupying a *particular* house; in a fourth, on dwelling within the town; in a fifth, on paying scot and lot; in a sixth, on boiling a pot; in a seventh, on being a burges, or the son of a burges; in an eighth, on marrying a burges's daughter; in a ninth, on serving an apprenticeship in a tenth, on being the tenant to a *large square stone*, marked 1, 2, or 3, in a nobleman's park wall*; in an eleventh, on paying an *occasional* tax for a royal dog-hole†; in a twelfth, on sleeping, one night previous to an election, in a *pig-stye*‡, and dignifying it with the name of a dwelling; and so on, to an almost endless variety of tenures, all of them *arbitrary*, and most of them too absurd for the sobriety of rational argumentation.

This comes of the monstrous doctrine of *qualifications* and *disqualifications*, and where it will end God only knows; for it would not be either more arbitrary nor more ridiculous, to say; *this* man shall vote, because he is a soldier in the guards; and *that* man shall not vote, because he will not swear that king's rule by *divine* right.

Why an Englishman, who happens to exercise malt in *Banbury*, shall be free, and the farmer who grows it in the next parish shall not be free——why a cobbler in a *Cinque Port* shall have his franchise, and a manufacturer in *Birmingham* have none——why the most venal wretch in the most venal borough shall be represented in parliament, and not a merchant nor a single inhabitant of *Leeds*, *Wakefield*, *Manchester*, or *Halifax*, enjoy the same benefit, I believe no casuists on earth, but the members of an English House of Commons, can determine. And how potwalloping, or occupying of Lord *Montacute's* stone, or sitting down in a *Shaftsbury* pig-stie, is to be the proof of a man's

* Lord *Montacute's*, at *Midhurst*.

† Last *Windsor* election.

‡ *Shaftsbury*, and other *Boroughs*. See *Legisl. Rights of the Com.* indicated 155. C 2

a man's being a *free-born Englishman*, I shall leave those able casuists also to explain. As well might such trumpery, in my opinion, be brought to prove, that any one were a *christian*, and not a pagan; a *white* man, and not a negro; a *human being*, and not a horse. But the disfranchisement of scores of towns, and the largest in particular; the exclusion of one class of men in this borough, and of another class in that; and so on; is but a mere taste of this filthy draught. I know not how you will swallow the whole; but what it is, may in some degree be conceived from the following particulars.

In a report of a Sub-Committee of Westminster, dated March 19, 1780, it is stated, that

130,000 Freeholders elect	92 Members for 52 Counties;
43,000 Citizens	— 52 ditto for 23 Cities and 2 Universities;
41,000 Electors	— 369 ditto for 192 Corporations
214,000	513

340 of these last choose 50 ditto, and a number scarcely above 6000, actually elect 257 ditto, which is a majority of the whole English House of Commons, and the efficient representation of above *five* millions of people*. So far the sub-committee.

But 257 is a majority of the fullest house, including Scotch members, that ever sat; and their 6000 electors, although spread out into *one hundred and ninety-two* Corporations, exceed not in number the male inhabitants of a *single town* of ordinary importance; such as *Leicester* or *Derby*. Who will say it were just, that the town of *Derby* should appoint one half of the national representation? Or that the representatives of *Leicester*, although they should amount to an *efficient* majority of those who met in Parliament, ought to make laws for the whole kingdom, and tax it at their discretion? You would not,

* The Committee, depending upon former calculations mention a number far too small.

bear this *Fellow Countrymen* : no man in England would bear it ; without he were contented to be himself a *Slave* and entail *Slavery* on his posterity . and yet, under the present circumstances, the tyranny and the insult is precisely the same.

Nor does *the very remarkable case of Middlesex and the Metropolis* less deserve your particular attention. Containing more than a *tenth* part of the nation, they send only 10 members to parliament ; Cornwall, which contains less than a *forty-ninth* part, sends 44*. Their proportion is only 10 ; that of Middlesex and the Metropolis is 50†. Again, 50 is the exact number of members chosen by the 340 Borough electors above mentioned ; whereas a *majority* of the males at man's estate in Middlesex and the Metropolis, is about *one hundred and thirteen thousand*. But you will be pleased to observe, that those 340 persons do *now* elect five times as many members as Middlesex and the Metropolis united. I believe also, it may be shewn, that less than 20 persons can command the election of as many members as Middlesex and the Metropolis, containing a *tenth part of the nation*, have now to represent them‡.

If therefore it now appears, that that House of Parliament which ought to be a full and equal representation of the people, is no such thing, but as different therefrom as darkness is from light, or tyranny from just government, need you wonder that wars should be waged in the cause of despotism ? or can you be surprized, that the will of the crown's minister should become an overbearing law to this land, capable of wresting from you your last shilling, in contempt of your complaints, in defiance of your inclinations ?

* Middlesex and the Metropolis united pay more than a seventh part of the national land-tax : Cornwall, less than a sixty third. But farther, 42 of the Cornish members are returned by a number of Burgeesses in the petty Boroughs, whose collective contribution do not probably amount to an hundredth part of that sixty third.

† See the people's Barrier against undue influence and corruption, p. 95.

‡ Burgh's Polit. Disq. I. 40—44.

Can it be law that *six thousand* persons should appoint an efficient majority of those lawmakers who ought to be appointed by not less than *one million, three hundred and thirteen thousand*, being a majority of *two million, six hundred and twenty-five thousand* electors * ? Can it be law, that a *seven thousand, seven hundred and twenty third part* of these electors (340) should nominate an *eleventh part* of these lawmakers ? when the due proportion of that number of which they constitute a majority, viz. 679‡ is less than a *sixth part of a single representative* Can it be law, that a single person, by means of borough property, shall have the power at his sole will to place in the House of Commons five or six, or eight or ten members, to represent him and him only ? To prove that such things are *law*, will, I presume, require more logic than all the lawyers in England are masters of.* And I

* 2,250,000 for England and Wales.
375,000 for Scotland.

2,625,000 Great Britain.

‡ 679
6

4074

† 513)	2,250,000	(4386	The number of Electors
	2052	4074	who ought to be repre-
	1980	312	sented by each member
	1539		of England and Wales;
	4410		a majority of whom is
	4104		2194. For Great Bri-
	3060		tain collectively the
	3078		number is still higher.

* "Law is the perfection of Reason."

"The law of England will not endure an absurdity." 9 Co. 22.

believe they would be somewhat puzzled to prove, that, under these circumstances, we enjoy a free government, or possess the English constitution. It is also a proper question to the men who are thus brought together, by means which a man of sense cannot look on without a blush nor an honest man without indignation, how they can suppose themselves justified in disposing of the property of the nation, and in making laws to affect the lives of the people.

The late Lord *North* thought his *justice*, his *impartiality*, his *honour* all concerned, to shew that, in common with all other parts of the kingdom, Middlesex and the Metropolis were *equally taxed**, I would to God, his honour and conscience had been as tender, to have seen them first *equally represented*! Representation, as I conceive, is to be *first*, and taxation to *follow*. Hence every one who is denied his vote for a representative, has a constitutional, and I will add, a *legal* exemption from taxes. If this be not so, reason is useless, and all the maxims of your law are nonsense. If we are to hear any more of *virtual representation*, let but *virtual taxation* go along with it, and then the fictions may perhaps be harmless enough. But fiction and shadow I suppose will not fill the treasury coffers, nor satisfy the cravings of our worthy placemen, pensioners and contractors. Neither will fiction and shadow defend the people's liberty.

As yet, I have said nothing of a parliament's continuing for *seven* years, when it is contrary to law that it should sit more than *one* without re-election. I say *contrary to law*; for no parliament ever had or could have authority to pass an act for that purpose. Such an act and freedom cannot exist together; as the IVth proposition of the declaration demonstrates. Hence, the septennial bill is a *void statute*, a *corruption*, and *no law*. It is even criminal in the people to submit to it; for therein they betray the rights of their country, and the ever-sacred cause of freedom: and whenever the lower House of parliament, under pretence of that void and wicked statute, presumes to set beyond the period of a single session it is no House of *Commons*, it is no part of that legislature which is required by the constitution of England.

That

* When called upon in the House of Commons by Mr. King.

That House may possibly *declare* the septennial bill to be a good law: or may perhaps *resolve*, that to say otherwise is a contempt, a misdemeanour, or I know not what: but all that will not change untruth into truth; nor make that just, which in its own nature is unjust.

There remains yet, in order to complete the picture of a modern House of Commons, to lay before you in its proper colours, the open and bare-faced bribery of its members, which is carried on in the face of day. Crimes sometimes become so very common, that, by the habit of continually looking on them, we loose a sense of their enormity, even in some cases the very consciousness of their existence. It is thus, I fear, with regard to the gross and public corruption of the people's parliamentary servants, against their obvious duty and fidelity. In what those principally consist, none can be ignorant. Representing *the third estate of the realm*, the first of their duties beyond all controversy, is to preserve the *existence* of that third estate. Whenever the commons have not a House of parliament *wholly* in their interest, *wholly* at their devotion, and *wholly* obedient to their will, then it is that a third estate in the realm has *no* existence; but a tyranny of some kind or other is established. They may still indeed, as a part of the animal creation, have a physical existence upon earth; but their political existence, as a free people, is at an end. Since the destruction of *the third* estate can only proceed from one or both of *the other two*, it is the especial duty of the Commons' House to be ever watchful of the Lords and the Crown; to resist their encroachments and to nip in the bud all their attempts against the life or well being of public freedom. And since of these two powers, the crown is infinitely the most formidable, it is there that the duties of vigilance and resistance in the representatives of the commons have the greatest compass and extent; being commensurate, not only to the immense authority vested in that branch of our government, but to whatever degree of power a prince might aspire to.

This being the case, I cannot see how any man, who is a representative of the commons with his guardianship upon his hands, can presume to hold at the same time under the crown, any lucrative place or employment whatever. Common

No. 2. *Will be published in a fortnight.*



